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History Re-born in the Skies: A new generation of Tuskegee pilots takes flight

TUSKEGEE, AL — In a poignant convergence of past and future, the historic grounds of Moton Field are once again echoing with the roar of aircraft engines, signaling a new chapter for American aviation. Over 80 years after the original Tuskegee Airmen shattered racial barriers during World War II, a fresh generation of pilots is taking to the skies, fueled by a multi-million dollar revival of flight training at Tuskegee University.

A Legacy Relunched

The university recently celebrated the relaunch of its Aviation Science program, bolstered by more than \$12 million in federal funding secured between



The Spirit of Tuskegee, a PF-13 Stearman biplane flown by Tuskegee Airmen training to fight in WWII, hangs from the ceiling above the concourse galleries at the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture on the National Mall September 14, 2016 in Washington, DC.

2025 and 2026. The initiative aims to address a critical national pilot shortage while honoring the “Red

Tail” legacy that began in 1941 when the 99th Pursuit Squadron became the first unit of Black pilots in the U.S. military.

“Tuskegee’s place in aviation history just started another chapter,” said Joe Tumham, Director of the Macon County Economic Development Authority, noting that the program is expected to create dozens of high-paying jobs in the region.

Breaking New Ground: The First of Many

Among the rising stars is Kembra H Parker, a 20-year-old student who recently became the first woman in the program’s inaugural class to earn her pilot’s license. Her achievement carries significant weight; while Black women served in vital support roles for the original Tuskegee Airmen, they were not permitted to fly in combat.

“There were Tuskegee women working but not flying,” Parker told NBC News, “so it feels pretty good to be doing the flying”.

The program, a partnership with LIFT Academy, allows students to earn a Bachelor of Science in Aviation Science alongside a commercial multi-engine pilot license in as little as three years. Students train on a fleet of advanced Diamond DA40 and DA42 aircraft, bridging the gap be-

tween the legendary P-51. The impact of the Tuskegee legacy extends far beyond the university gates. The U.S. Air Force continues to integrate this history into its core identity. Even as recent policy shifts led to the review of certain federal training materials, the Air Force clarified that the history of the Tuskegee Airmen and the Women Airforce Service Pilots (WASPs) remains a non-negotiable pillar of military education. Defense Secretary Pete Hegseth reaffirmed this commitment, stating that any move to diminish this heritage was “immediately reversed,” ensuring that the “documented historic legacy and decorated valor” of these units continue to inspire new recruits.

Further cementing this bond, the military’s newest advanced trainer, the T7A Red Hawk, was specifically named to pay homage to the “Red Tails”. The aircraft’s signature red-painted tail serves as a flying monument to the 992 aviators who flew over 15,000 sorties and earned 96 Distinguished Flying Crosses.

A Global Community of Support

Organizations like Tuskegee Airmen Inc. (TAI) and Tuskegee NEXT are ensuring the pipeline for underrepresented youth remains strong through scholarships and summer flight academies. At the recent 2025 National Convention in New Orleans, original airmen—some over 100 years old—met with the teenagers who will soon follow in their flight paths.

For students like Parker and her classmates, the mission is clear: to maintain the standard of excellence set by their predecessors. As they climb into the cockpit at Moton Field, they aren’t just learning to fly; they are carrying the weight of history—and the promise of a more inclusive sky—under their wings. □

The Heart of Innovation: How tiny, wireless pacemakers are redefining cardiac care

In the world of modern medicine, sometimes the biggest breakthroughs come in the smallest packages. For decades, the image of a pacemaker was a device roughly the size of a tea biscuit, implanted under the collarbone with long, thin wires—or “leads”—threading through veins into the heart. While life-saving, these traditional systems came with a “pocket” of risks, from lead fractures to infections in the surgical site.

Today, a quiet revolution is unfolding inside the human chest. The rise of leadless pacemakers, some no larger than a vitamin capsule or even a grain of rice, is transforming the patient experience from one of surgery and recovery to one of seamless, invisible healing.

A New Era of “Leadless” Liberty

The most significant leap in recent years has been the move toward leadless technology. Devices like the Medtronic Micra™



This picture obtained on April 2, 2025 shows a pacemaker next to a single grain of rice on a finger.

and Abbott AVEIR™ are implanted directly into the heart’s chambers via a minimally invasive catheter. Because there are no wires and no surgical “pocket,” the primary sources of complications—such as lead dislodgment or pocket infections—are virtually eliminated.

Recent data from 2025 and 2026 highlights the growing success of these devices: Extended Longevity: New generations, like the Micra AV2, now boast a projected battery life of nearly 16 to 17 years, meaning roughly 80% of patients may only ever need one device for their entire lives.

Dual-Chamber Precision: Historically, leadless devices were limited to single-chamber pacing. However, the introduction of systems like the AVEIR DR allows two tiny devices to “talk” to each other using pulses through the blood, synchronizing the atrium and ventricle just like a nat-

ural heart.

Invisible Recovery: Patients often report feeling “marvellous” shortly after the procedure, with some noting they cannot even feel the device inside them. Without a visible chest scar or a physical “bump,” the psychological burden of a chronic heart condition is significantly reduced.

From Vitamin Pills to Grains of Rice

While leadless capsules are the current clinical standard, the next frontier is even smaller. Researchers at Northwestern University have developed a temporary pacemaker no larger than a grain of rice.

This “rice-sized” marvel is designed for patients who only need pacing for a short period—such as those recovering from open-heart surgery. Remarkably, this device is battery-free and dissolvable. It can be injected via a syringe, activated by light pulses from a wearable chest patch, and once its job is done, □

From Kitchen to Kilowatts: The new “tofu brine” battery that never dies—and never catches fire!

Scientists from the City University of Hong Kong and Southern University of Science and Technology have unveiled a groundbreaking “tofu-brine” battery that could revolutionize the global energy storage landscape. This innovative aqueous (water-based) battery uses an electrolyte so safe it is comparable to the mineral-rich brine used to coagulate tofu, offering a non-toxic and fireproof alternative to traditional lithium-ion systems.

A Leap in Longevity and Safety

The most striking feature of the tofu-brine battery is its incredible durability. While standard lithium-ion batteries typically degrade after 1,000 to 3,000 charge cycles, this new prototype has demonstrated the ability to withstand over

120,000 cycles with minimal performance loss. In practical terms, this could allow a single battery to last for decades, significantly reducing the environmental impact of frequent battery replacements.

Safety remains a paramount concern for modern electronics, especially given the flammability risks associated with lithium. Because the tofu-brine battery operates under neutral pH conditions and uses a water-based electrolyte, it is inherently non-flammable and fireproof. It eliminates the risk of “thermal runaway,” making it safe to touch and operate even in extreme environments.

Environmental and Geopolitical Impact

The shift toward sustainable energy often hits a roadblock with the environ-



A worker cuts tofu at a tofu factory in Surabaya on February 5, 2026.

tal cost of mining lithium and cobalt. The tofu-brine technology relies on abundant, less-hazardous materials like magnesium chloride or calcium chloride—common minerals found in soil and used in food production. This means the batteries are environmentally benign and can be discarded without the spe-

cialized hazardous waste processing required for lithium cells.

Beyond ecology, the technology has massive geopolitical implications. Currently, the global battery supply chain is heavily dominated by specific mining regions. By utilizing common minerals instead of rare-earth elements, nations could

potentially develop domestic battery manufacturing more easily, diversifying the market and enhancing global energy resilience.

Future Applications: From Grids to EVs

While the technology is currently in the research phase, its potential applications are vast:

Grid-Scale Storage: Its 120,000-cycle lifespan makes it ideal for balancing solar and wind farms, which require frequent, heavy-duty cycling to store energy for night use.

Electric Vehicles (EVs): With improved energy density, these batteries could provide a safer, life-long power source for cars that may never need a battery swap during their entire operational life. □

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South Korean director Park Chan-wook attends a press conference for the opening film 'No Other Choice' of the 30th Busan International Film Festival (BIFF) at the Busan Cinema Center in Busan on September 17, 2025.

S.Korea's Park Chan-wook to head Cannes festival jury

Paris, France

South Korean filmmaker Park Chan-wook, the first from his country to head the Cannes film festival jury, will preside over the 79th edition in May, organisers announced Thursday. A statement named the director behind "Oldboy" (2003) as president of the body that will award the 2026 Palme d'Or. Last year the award went to Iranian filmmaker Jafar Panahi's "It Was Just an Accident."

The appointment, which organisers called "a first for Korean cinema", came as South Korean culture enjoys global recognition, with Park's films hailed alongside Bong Joon-ho's 2019 Palme d'Or and Oscar best picture winning film "Parasite", the hugely popular television series "Squid Game" and "KPop Demon Hunters" as well as K-pop groups BIS and Blackpink.

"In this age of hatred and

division, I believe that the simple act of coming together in a movie theatre to watch a film at the same time... makes it possible to create a moving, universal sense of solidarity," the statement quoted Park, 62, as saying.

The festival praised his genre-blending cinema as "narrative, stylistic (and) moral". Park has long been credited for inspiring a generation of filmmakers behind the "Korean noir" genre movies about bloody crimes, brutal revenge or the criminal underworld, presented with sumptuous cinematography, including Bong.

The director with a strong appetite for vengeance and redemption whose violent or erotic films are not afraid to shock won a best director award at Cannes four years ago for "Decision to Leave", a romantic

thriller.

- Lover of literature -

Park achieved international stature with "Oldboy", which won the Grand Prix at Cannes in 2004.

Based on a cult manga, the second instalment of a dark trilogy about revenge tackled social inequalities a hallmark of Korean cinema. His latest work, "No Other Choice" (2025), is adapted from Donald Westlake's 1997 novel "The Ax" and follows an unemployed man who decides to kill his potential competitors to land a job.

It starred South Korea's top actors "Squid Game" star Lee Byung-hun and "Crash Landing on You" actress Son Ye-jin in the lead.

The film touched on contemporary anxieties over artificial intelligence, Park has said, reflecting its broader theme of the job market, including the cinema industry. □

Thieves target high-value Pokemon cards as franchise turns 30

New York, United States

What began as a quiet meetup of Pokemon enthusiasts at a U.S. store ended with an armed robbery in which masked men held the group at gunpoint to steal more than \$100,000 in trading cards.

The January heist in New York was the latest in a string of thefts targeting collectors of Pokemon, the Japanese media franchise that marks its 30th anniversary on Friday.

Pokemon cards, bearing "little monsters" that attract children as well as adult superfans, have soared in value in recent years.

US influencer Logan Paul this month set a new world record by banking \$16.5 million with his sale of a rare Pikachu card arguably the most iconic Pokemon character.

But high prices have attracted criminals keen to cash in.

Pokemon cards "are high value in a small footprint, demand is broad and consistent, and the resale ecosystem is large," said Nick Jaman, founder and CEO of the Certified Trading Card Association.

"That combination means stolen product can move quickly sometimes across state lines through a mix of online marketplaces, card shows, and informal buyer networks," he told AFP.

- 'Big target' -

The New York robbery, which police are yet to solve, was not an isolated incident.

Thieves in California made off this month with about \$180,000 worth of Pokemon trading cards after drilling through a wall to access a store.

"We got a big target on our back in this trading card, collectible world now," owner Duy Pham told CBS News after the burglary.

It was the second time in less than a year that his shop was robbed.

Similar thefts have also been reported in Japan, Britain, Canada and Australia. □



Pokemon cards are sorted for a beginners' clinic during the first day of the 2019 Pokemon World Championships at the Washington Convention Center August 16, 2019, in Washington, DC.

Kyiv residents pool together for solar panels and batteries amid Russian strikes

Kyiv, Ukraine

When Russian strikes cut off the power, heating and water to swathes of the Ukrainian capital in -20C temperatures, Denys Biletsky was prepared.

Following a round of particularly intense Russian barages two years earlier, Biletsky had convinced his neighbours to chip in together to install solar panels and batteries on the roof of their high-rise apartment block.

As Ukraine accuses Russia of trying to freeze the population into submission with its most intense attacks on the energy network of the entire war, more and more people in Kyiv are fundraising and pooling cash to buy alternative sources of shared electricity.

"Without backup power, our building simply wouldn't be able to function," Biletsky, the 42-year-old head of his building's homeowners' association, told AFP.

On the roof of the 25-storey block, overlooking a sea of residential towers stretching across the horizon, he dusted fresh snowfall off



Chairman of the Board of the Association of Co-Owners of the Apartment Building 'Dzhere lo' Denys Biletsky, 42, inspects solar panels on the rooftop of a residential building, which has been suffering from heating and power outages, in the Pozniaky district of Kyiv on February 22, 2026, amid the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

dozens of solar panels with a wooden brush.

The 400-odd residents pooled 700,000 hryvnias (\$16,200) to buy and install them, along with the batteries and other required equipment.

Russian missile and drone barages have pushed Kyiv

into its most serious energy crisis of the war.

Electricity is turned off for hours on end to ration supplies, and more than 1,000 of Kyiv's 12,000 high-rise residential buildings have been without heating for the past month after a heating station was destroyed.

The back-up supply in Biletsky's block meant the lift unlike in many buildings was still shuttling up and down, and electric pumps were able to send water to the top floors.

Without it, there would be none above the ninth floor, said Biletsky.

"After the inverter was installed, we have constant heating, hot and cold water," said Tetyana Taran, who lives on the 20th floor. The inverter is the device that automatically draws supplies from the battery when the mains switch off. "The fact that I also get to use the lift is great," the 47-year-old added.

- 'Main achievement' -

In her building in central Kyiv, Tetyana Chemysenko is another person who persuaded her neighbours to club together for a generator.

"We printed lists, collected signatures, posted notices explaining what it will be and what it's for," she said. Now they were waiting for it to arrive.

"People in this building are far from poor. Most have installed autonomous systems for themselves," Chernysenko, 55, explained. Her family opted for solar panels.

"But heating and elevators can't be fixed locally. You can't solve that with a battery in your own flat." □

Pakistani sculptor turns scrap into colossal metal artworks

Islamabad, Pakistan

Sparks fly and metal groans in a cavernous workshop on the outskirts of Islamabad, where Pakistani artist Ehtisham Jadoon fuses discarded car parts into colossal pieces inspired by "Transformers" movies and dinosaurs.

The 35-year-old sculptor's studio brims with cogs, chains, hubcaps and engine parts as his hulking creations a lion with a mane of twisted steel, a giant Tyrannosaurus rex and a towering Optimus Prime take shape.

"I have always been fascinated by metal objects," Jadoon told AFP after assembling the 14-foot (4-metre) "Transformers" character, his biggest creation yet.

"When I see metals in

scrap, I imagine forms in which it could be utilised."

It took Jadoon and his team months of welding and warping to fashion his Optimus Prime, with over 90 percent of its parts sourced from discarded vehicle pieces.

The arms are forged from motorbike springs and gears, its shoulders are curve from car rims, the spine is moulded from a fuel tank and its knees are pieced together with chains and suspension parts.

Even its piercing eyes are crafted from vehicle bearings, completing a sculpture that is both intricate and awesome.

"Whenever I see an object, I visualise a form," Jadoon said.

"I could imagine a block transforming into a shape,

so I simply solve the puzzle and bring it to life."

- 'Waste becomes valuable' -

Jadoon, a former martial artist who once worked in the steel fabrication business, has never formally studied art. He designs his gargantuan models spontaneously while working. He told AFP he has to visit a doctor almost every week due to sparks affecting his eyes and burns on his hands and arms, yet he insists this is the only work in which he can channel the energy of his training as a fighter.

Jadoon's work primarily focuses on crafting giants, beasts and powerful forms, which he describes as a reflection of aggression.

"Setting the anatomy and

proportions requires visualisation from multiple angles and repeated adjustments," he said.

Every week, Jadoon tours scrapyards in Islamabad, sifting through tons of discarded metal in search of pieces that fit into his

imagination and then become sculptures.

"What is waste to us became something valuable in his hands," scrapyard owner Bostan Khan told AFP.

"It's incredible to witness." □



This photograph taken on February 12, 2026 shows sculptor Ehtisham Jadoon working on a model of Optimus Prime, a film character from Transformers, made from scrap metal at his studio on the outskirts of Islamabad.

Bulgaria ski station becomes refuge for digital nomads

Bansko, Bulgaria

Climate change may threaten the value of Bansko's prime ski slopes, but the Bulgarian resort has found an all-seasons solution to boost its economy, drawing in a cosmopolitan community of digital nomads. Three centres offering hundreds of co-working spaces to online workers have sprung up in the town in recent years, supported by a fast internet connection and improved infrastructure.

"I read that this was the best place to start as a digital nomad," said Oscar Train, a 25-year-old Dane who since 2021 has worked remotely from Bansko for about six months of the year.

"I came here to kind of learn how to do it and meet like-minded people," he added. "You've got people from all over the world, all different kinds of professions."

Train, who grew up in Britain and works for an insurance company there, pays about 15 percent in taxes here including social contributions. If he was still in the UK, he said, it would be 45 percent, without social contribution.



People work in a co-working centre in Bansko on February 13, 2026.

The main draw for him however, is the lifestyle.

In winter, thanks in part to the one-hour time difference with London, he starts his day with two hours of skiing on Bansko's 75 kilometres (47 miles) of slopes, which have hosted World Cup races.

Then he can dust off the snow and go to work.

In summer too, he enjoys a cultural calendar including events specifically tailored to people like him, such as the week-long Nomad Fest

that celebrates the "remote lifestyle" with community-led activities and networking.

- International arrivals -

Bansko sits among the Karst peaks of the Pirin range. Look up from your computer screen and you can see Mount Vihren, towering over the town at almost 3,000 metres (10,000 feet) high.

The 10,000-inhabitant town is surrounded by hot springs and is just two hours' drive

from the capital Sofia and two and a half hours from the Greek coast.

Along with the relatively new co-working spaces, high-end restaurants and coffee shops have also popped up amid the resort's stone houses and cobbled streets. A bike lane is also under construction.

Bansko mayor Stoycho Banenski could not give an exact number of foreigners who have moved to the town, but their economic

impact was "significant", he said especially given climate change was increasingly undermining winter sports.

Tourism helped the local economy bounce back strongly after the shutdown during the Covid pandemic, said a February report by the Sofia-based think tank Institute of Market Economics. The arrival of foreigners helped smooth out seasonal fluctuations in income, it added.

"But perhaps the most important thing is the change they bring," said Banenski, a mountain rescuer by profession.

"It is extremely important that people from all over the world live here and that we can exchange ideas, opinions and different perspectives on the world," he added.

- 'Gentrification' -

Many of those who first came to Bansko as travellers have settled there. Today, hundreds of families from all over the world live in the town.

French couple Anne Dupal, 47, and Christian Rudnicki, 53, both former graphic designers, have opened a micro-bakery since moving to Bansko in early 2022. □

French programmer says accidentally hacked 7,000 robot vacuums

Tokyo, Japan

All he wanted was to move his robot vacuum cleaner around with a PlayStation controller. But programmer

Sammy Azdoufal claims he unwittingly gained remote access to 7,000 other devices.

His experience has drawn

attention to the potential security risks of smart home gadgets, with Chinese manufacturer DJI saying it had fixed a "vulnerability" detected in its software.

The French tech worker, based in Barcelona, told AFP on a phone call this week that he had tried to customise his flashy DJI Romo vacuum cleaner out of curiosity.

"They have an app linked to the vacuum. So I tried to understand what the app was sending to the robot when I'm moving the robot," Azdoufal said.

After linking up the gaming controller, he decided he wanted to make the vacuum cleaners sound like

it was crying when low on battery.

"Sometimes my brain is weird," the 32-year-old laughed.

Azdoufal tinkered further to find its battery status but was confused and "a little bit scared" when he began to also see the data of thousands of other vacuum cleaners.

"You can have a full map of all the rooms, you can have access to the camera, microphone," as well as a rough location for each device, he claimed. Having alerted a friend to his discovery, "we freak out together and I start to mail DJI" about the apparent security breach, recount-

ed Azdoufal, head of artificial intelligence for a holiday rental platform.

The programmer, who used to work in cybersecurity, said his wife has since covered up the camera on their vacuum cleaner.

- 'Superfancy' -

With no immediate reply from the company, Azdoufal contacted specialist tech media outlet The Verge, who gave him the 14-digit serial number of a DJI Romo it had recently reviewed.

The Verge reported that the Frenchman was able to generate an accurate floor plan of its reporter's home and see that the robot was in use. □



A display of Roomba robot vacuums made by iRobot sits on a store shelf on December 15, 2025, in Miami, Florida.

Basic driving rules on Aruba: Traffic signs

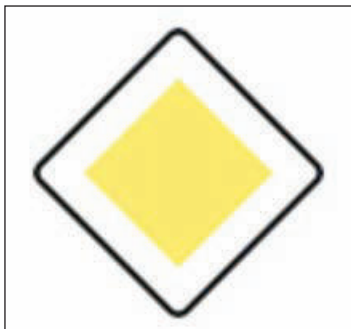
(Oranjestad)—Though Aruba's traffic is relatively easy to manage, driving here—especially if it's your first time visiting—can be foreign. To help you out, here's a breakdown of some traffic signs you might encounter on the road.

Speed limit in certain areas As mentioned in yesterday's issue, the legal minimum and maximum speed limit on the island is 50 and 80 km/h respectively. However, there are some areas where it is mandated to drive up to a certain speed. This is always indicated by a circular traffic sign with red border and the number 50 on it. Signs like these are always paired by a similar sign with the number crossed out further down the road. This means that the mandate for this speed is now over; you may increase your velocity. Red borders on traffic sign—whether it's a circle or triangle—usually signal a warning, prohibition or preference.

Besides the “50” sign, you may also encounter a traffic sign that says “bebouwde kom”. These can be found in San Nicolas and Oranjestad. Bebouwde kom signs are rectangular and blue, and essentially tell you that you are in a heavily inhabited area. The maximum speed limit in a bebouwde kom is 50 km/h. Just like the previous pair, bebouwde kom signs are also paired with a similar sign crossed out.

Priority signs

On the main roads of Aruba (not the highways), you may see a yellow, squared sign with a white border. This sign tells you

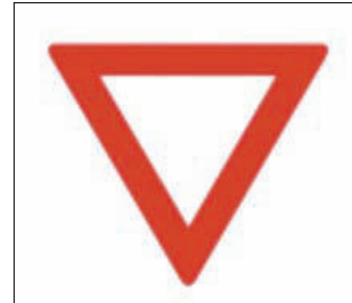


that on this road, you have priority and all other traffic should yield to you. This sign can be seen in Savaneta for example. So, if you are driving on the main road in Savaneta going to San Nicolas, you are driving on a single long road, and other cars that want to get on this main road or cross it, either from an intersection or from a dirt road, must all wait until traffic on the main road is clear. In other words, you do not have to stop for them. This sign too has a counter part that indicates that your priority is over.

Another priority sign you may encounter is a triangle sign with a red border and something that looks like a cross. You'll see this sign in an intersection. The general rule of thumb for crossing an intersection that do not contain traffic lights, roundabouts, sign or arrows on the road, is to always yield for traffic on your right. However, if you encounter this sign on your side of the intersection, you have priority over the other cars, even the one on your right.

However, be careful not to confuse this sign with a similar up-side down

triangle, also found on intersections. This sign is a prohibition sign, telling you that you have to stop and give other cars priority. Of course you also have a “stop” sign that mean the same thing. The stop sign is generally used for tricky



intersections with minimal view of opposite incoming traffic.

These are some of the basic rules that you would have to know if you decide to drive on the island. These

are of course other traffic signs, and we recommend you visit aruba-travelguide.com for an extensive overview of all traffic signs used on Aruba.

Picture credits: aruba-travelguide.com

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Beaches for the whole family to enjoy!

(Oranjestad)—One of the biggest concerns that parents have when traveling with their children is a guarantee of their safety and healthy enjoyment. Therefore, we thought it would be a great help to traveling parents to list off some the most family-friendly beaches around the island.

Baby Beach in San Nicolas Baby Beach is one Aruba's most popular and visited beaches, and for good reason: This sandy and quiet lagoon is a great place for parents to sit back and relax while their children play in the shallow shores of the beach. Beside the relaxing atmosphere, there are also several services that may accommodate your stay, like a parking lot, sun tent rentals, chairs, bathrooms and a snack bar right at the far left of



the beach.

Mangel Halto in Pos Chiquito

Mangel Halto is situated in the back streets of Pos Chiquito. Though there are several stairs on the sides of the beach cliff leading you down, the best spot

for families to hang out is across the bridge, passed the mangrove trees near the entrance sign. Here, there are small and big palapas, perfect for big and small families to set up their belongings. In this area, the shore is also shallow, falling right around

your knee before slowly getting deeper: perfect for kids to safely play.

Eagle Beach/Palm Beach

Yet another highly popular beach sites, Eagle Beach and Palm Beach is where most of our visitors go to tan, swim or play in the

white sand. Because they are near the low-rise and high-rise hotel areas, these beaches are the most accessible for visitors on foot. These beaches also offer many palapas free to use, but you can also rent chairs and tents. Much like Baby Beach, these sites are one of the best beaches for your children to play and build sand castles.

Boca Catalina in Malmok

Boca Catalina is a small bay beach near the Malmok beach area further down the hotel areas. Though it may not be a very sandy beach, it is relatively quiet and tranquil. This is a great place for family to lay down a big blanket and have a little picnic. This is also one of the best places to snorkel, as this area is filled with little fish and corals, even close to the shore.

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Explore Aruba!

(ORANJESTAD)—Aruba Today collected some things to do BEYOND the beach. Aruba, located 15 miles north of Venezuela in the warm waters of the southern Caribbean, is home to beautiful white-sand beaches, 82-degree days, and thus ideal for the perfect beach day. But we are also blessed with some of the warmest people in the world and our island is 19.6 miles long and 6 miles across, with a total area of 70 square miles. Bit more to discover than the white stretch on the coastline we say. Let's mention some of these hidden gems.

Arikok National Park

The Arikok National park is worth the ride. We love the hikes that are guided by the park's rangers whose job is to maintain trails and protect natural resources. The flora and fauna are beautiful and the historical sites tell you about the



island's indigenous roots. If you are not up to walking, you can drive through the park, one way or another this park is a great place to spend an entire day. Cruising through the landscape you end up at some of the most stunning beaches like Dos Playa or Daimara Beach. In total, the park consists of 34 square kilo-

meters of protected nature with a richness of animals living in it. The Aruban whip-tail lizard (cododo), Aruban cat eye snake (santanero) and endangered rattle snake (cascabel) are just some of them, you can also admire these close in the park's Visitors' Center. For more information, visit the website www.acfaw



Natural Bridge

One of Aruba's favorite tourist attractions is the Natural Bridge. For thousands of years, pounding waves and strong winds have slowly chiseled away the limestone cliffs along Aruba's north coast to create several natural bridges. The largest of these bridges used to be the famous Natural Bridge. The bridge was a formation of coral limestone cut out by years of pounding surf, and was one of the largest of these types of spans in the world. It stood some 23 feet (7 meters) above sea level and spans more than 100 feet (30 meters). Unfortunately the bridge collapsed on September 2, 2005. Despite this, it is still the most photographed natural bridge and it remains a popular tourist attraction in Aruba, with the adjacent and intact Baby Bridge also meriting a visit. The Natural Bridge is the perfect stop while touring Aruba. There

is no admission fee or set hours for visiting. Quench your thirst with refreshing beverages & refuel your tank with local snacks.

The Lourdes Grotto

Named in commemoration of the famous French religious landmark, was created under the guidance of a priest named "Erkamp" and parishioners in the year 1958. The grotto, a shrine built into the rocks is located in Seme Preto, just off the main road to San Nicolas. A statue of the Virgin Mary, weighing 700 kilos, was hoisted into place in the grotto. Every year, on February 11 (feast of Lady of Lourdes), a procession leaves from the St. Theresa church in San Nicolas to the grotto, where a mass is performed. The grotto is located road-side and can be visited daily. Just make sure you park safely in the event you wish to stop for pictures at this location.



The stories of “Compa Nanzi”

(Oranjestad)—The most popular character you may hear about in the Caribbean is Anansi, known locally on Aruba as “Compa Nanzi”. Local children grew up hearing the tales of the conniving spider, and his legacy forms part of the oral narrative tradition that is common in Aruba.

Although the stories are most popular in the Caribbean, “Compa Nanzi” is not entirely unknown globally, especially not in the West African region. Brought to the “new world” by enslaved Africans from Ghana, the historical thread of how Nanzi was introduced on Aruba follows the enslaved Africans in Curaçao during the colonial era, which saw the biggest population of enslaved Africans in the Dutch Caribbean.

The stories of Compa Nanzi were a sign of hope for freedom among the slaves, who passed around different stories involving the famous spider through word of mouth, due to not being able to express their native culture in the new world. These stories were a way to not only preserve their culture, but it acted as a medium for relief during the harsh treatment to which they were subjected to.

It wasn’t until the end of the nineteenth century that the stories of Nanzi were written down in different languages. However, not all stories are completely alike in every country, as is the risk of oral story telling.

However, one thing will always be dominant in Compa Nanzi’s stories: his sneaky ways to get what he wants!

How Nanzi fooled the king

One day Nanzi was taking a stroll near the castle of Shon Arei, the king. He had this sudden urge to walk in. He didn’t think too much about it and committed to what he had in mind. It was a warm afternoon, and the castle personnel were taking their afternoon nap. Even the soldier guarding

the castle door was fast asleep, snoring so loud that his beard bounced up and down on his chin. Nanzi just slipped past him, looked back for a moment then walk right on in.

Nanzi stumbled upon the king’s quarters. With all his excitement he sat in the king’s throne, and put on his crown that was hanging on the side of the throne. It was very hot that day, and it wasn’t long until Nanzi too fell asleep, right there on the king’s throne. He was so deep in sleep and snoring so loud, that even when the king found him in his seat, Nanzi did not even notice.

Shon Arei was flabbergasted by the sight of Nanzi on his throne, wearing his crown. How disrespectful! “Soldiers, get him!” he commanded. Nanzi was sound asleep, but when the soldiers picked him up, he jumped from fright. By then though, the soldier already had him in their hold.

“Put him in a sack, stitch it up and throw him in the ocean!” the king said furiously.



ously. Two soldiers immediately entered the chamber, took the crown off Nanzi’s head and pushed him in a sack.

Nanzi was terrified; it looks like this time he won’t get away with his schemes. To get to the ocean, the soldier walked a long distance, and where beginning to feel very thirsty. Luckily they passed by a pub, and decided to have a nice cold beer. They set the sack with Nanzi in it outside and went to enjoy the refreshments. Nanzi was still trembling with fear in the sack.

What is that he hears? A herd of sheep walking by? “Compadre, listen here!” Nanzi screamed as loud as he could. The sheep herder got close to the sack. “What is this?”

“Man, there is something very beautiful in here that you can see. It’s very rare and strange, but indeed, there is something so beautiful in here that you’ve never seen or will ever see,” Nanzi told the herder.

The herder, very dumb, be-



lieved Nanzi’s word. “Let me see!” he said.

“Well if you must insist,” Nanzi said, “I’ll let you take a look, but only for a quick second.” The herder opened the sack, and Nanzi immediately jumped out. Before the herder could even take a look into the sack, Nanzi pushed him in it, and the herder fell head first in.

Nanzi didn’t waste any time, and closed off the sack real tight. He then picked up the herder’s hat and started walking behind the traveling sheep as if nothing happened. After a little while, the soldiers headed back outside to continue their journey. As they picked up the sack, the poor herder started screaming to let him out, but the soldiers ignored him, thinking it was Nanzi.

Shon Arei went strolling a while later. He thought to himself: “This time Nanzi could not get away with his foolishness. He probably drowned in that sack ages ago.”

That is why, when he saw Nanzi walk behind the herd of sheep on the street, he was flabbergasted again. “Nanzi! Aren’t you suppose to be at the bottom of the

ocean floor?”

“I was, Your Majesty,” Nanzi replied. But you know what; there are so many things to see down there in the sack! Like this herd of sheep. Seeing that they had no herder, I started walking behind them and gained their trust pretty quickly. At the bottom of the ocean there are so many wonderful things, like diamonds, and bags of gold. Chests of silver and other precious stones,” Nanzi told the king.

“What is that you say?” the king was intrigued. “I want to see it too!”

The king immediately demanded to his soldiers to be put in a sack and be placed in the ocean. Naturally, Shon Arei died because of this. He was never found again. Nanzi followed the soldier back to the castle, where he sat on the late king’s throne and put his crown on. He took possession of all of Shon Arei’s belongings, and lived the rest of his life asking.

Story and pictures are from “Kon Nanzi a Nek Shon Arei (i otro kuentanan antiano di e araña sabi)” by Nilda Pinto.

Dining in? Try making some local favorites! How to make “func hi”



(Oranjestad)—One of the most famous Aruban snacks or appetizers is “func hi hasa” (fried polenta sticks), a super easy meal that adults and children will both enjoy. Here’s how to make it!

Before we start, get to know the basics

What is func hi hasa? Func hi, or Aruban polenta, is a popular side dish for lo-

caldishes, like soups, stews and fried fish. Made from a corn flour, water and butter mixture, this appetizer is traditionally eaten alongside a warm meal. However, locals also like to fry sticks of func hi for a quick and filling snack.

Ingredients (measured by heart)

1. Polenta flour/ Func hi flour
2. Water
3. Butter
4. Salt to taste

Directions

Bring water to a boil in a medium-sized sauce pan. Add in some salt and butter to taste in the boiling water and let this dissolve and melt. Then, gradually

add the flour while stirring with a wooden spoon. The mixture will start to begin to harden pretty fast, so be careful not to add too much. At this phase of cooking, you want a goopy thick mixture, but thin enough so you can continue to stir to get all the lumps out.

After reaching a semi-firm, yet flexible texture, grab a baking pan or any large, deep plate, and pour the mixture in. Be sure that this plate is wet or greased so that the mixture does not stick to the bottom. Let this cool completely while it firms up for the last time. Once it’s cooled you can enjoy it as is, topped with some butter or shredded



cheese. Or, you can take it to another level of deliciousness.

When your func hi is firm enough, cut it into strips (size is up to you). Heat up some oil in a pan and fry those babies up! After

frying, you can top it with some cheese or enjoy it with your favorite dipping sauce.

Photo credit of fried func hi sticks: Jacqueline Felida on Pinterest.

Birds of Aruba: Soaring through the blue skies



(Oranjestad)—Aruba’s nature is very diverse and is home to several beautiful and majestic wildlife. Among these is the bright Tupial, whose angelic voice is always heard with the rising sun; the cuddly parakeet, always in company of another, and the majestic Warawara, a mighty bird that can be seen soaring in the clear blue skies.

Tupial

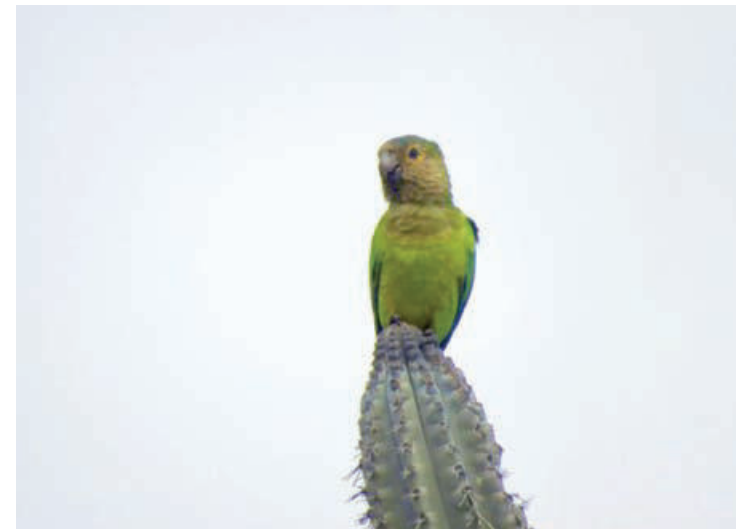
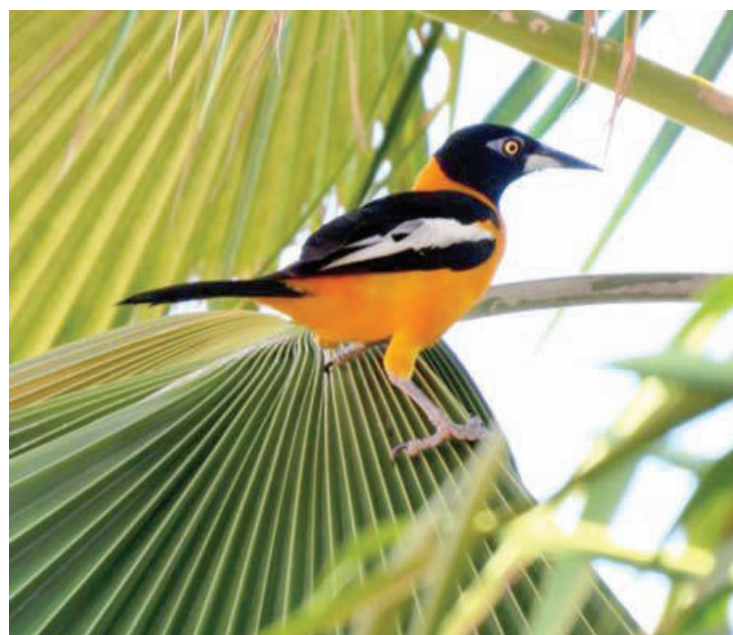
Icterus icterus, or known locally as the Venezuelan or Orange Tropicbird, is a striking songbird whose bright orange feathers can be spotted from a far dis-

tance. Known to be the first bird to sing at the first sign of sunrise, this beloved songbird likes to wake up with a tune. But don’t let their angelic songs fool you; the Tupial can be a bit aggressive towards any threat, protective over their nesting spots. Nesting spots they most likely stole from other birds. Tupials can be seen regularly, often in trees or on top of a cactus.

Photo Credit: Daniel Ruben Gonzalez

Prikic hi (parakeet)

The Brown-throated Prikic hi



(Aratinga pertinax) became the national bird of Aruba back in 2015, at the request of Aruba Birdlife Conservation. The bright

green, adorable parakeet usually flies in flock of 30 or more, but its population has been declining since the 2010s.

Prikic his are a shier breed than the tropicbird, often flying away at the sign of any threat. They use termite nests for breeding spots and feed mostly on seeds from the Kwih tree, Divi Divi tree and fruits.

Photo Credit: Daniel Ruben Gonzalez

Warawara

The Warawara or Caracara is one of the biggest birds found in the Aruban world. At a height of 41 to 60 cm, their wingspan can measure up to 125 cm.

Known as the “garbage man”, this bird of prey mostly feeds on dead animals. Its coat is dark brown, with a cream-colored neck, orange face, thick beak and long legs. The Warawara prefers to build its nest in the middle of tall cacti and produces a rattling, screaming sound, throwing its head back while calling.

While these birds are a beautiful sight to behold, it is very important to keep your distance and respect their habitats. This is how we protect our wildlife. By admiring the beauty of Aruba in a safe and respectful manner, we can do our part in protecting our sacred nature.

Photo Credit: Aruba Birdlife Conservation

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By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS

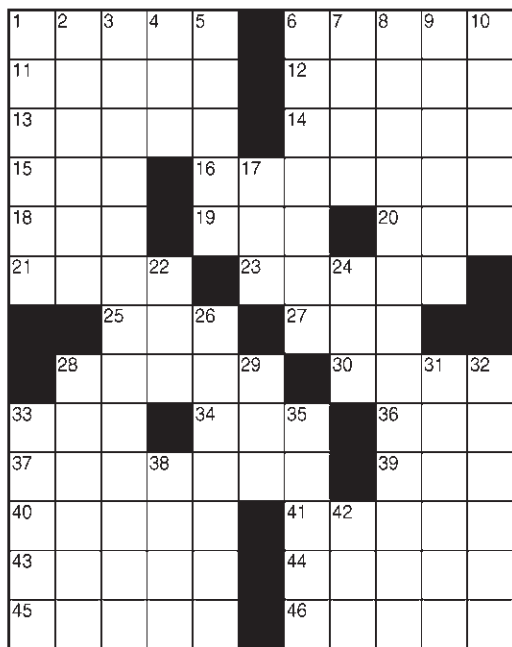
- 41 Blown away
1 Beer amounts
6 Pet store buys
11 Birth-related
12 Calendar entry
13 Texas landmark
14 Joyful
15 Under the weather
16 Under-wear type
18 Maui souvenir
19 Naughty act
20 Wisdom bringer
21 Headliner
23 Sculpting medium
25 "Platoon" setting
27 Bro's sibling
28 Moving about
30 Endure
33 Nest egg acct.
34 Bashful pal
36 First número
37 MIT rival
39 Boar's mate
40 Michelle or Malia

- 43 City of southern France
44 Striped cat
45 Virtuous one
46 Goes downhill

DOWN

- 1 Slow movers
2 Bill holder
3 Soppres-sata, e.g.
4 Whale group
5 Casino machines
6 Sticks
7 Declare
8 Knack-wurst, e.g.
9 Incense
10 Fashion
17 That guy's
22 Maze runner
24 Motor need
26 Home of many
28 Mecca setting
29 Bird of myth
31 Deceived
32 Castle parts
33 Pics to click
35 Vouchers
38 Govt. agents
42 Goose egg

BEET LOYAL
ELSE DIRECT
TMAN ELATED
HOUSECAT
PLACEMAT
ENROLL ICE
MEETS MANNA
USA PORKER
STRAWHAT
TRANSFAT
MAPLES HERO
ATEASE OTIS
YEAST WADS



3-10

AXYDLBAAXR
is LONGFELLOW

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

3-10

CRYPTOQUOTE

SGBQB'N YKSGHYD CKQB
BCZTQQTNNHYD SGTY SK GTOB
BTQYBE SGB EHNPTOKQ KP T
ABQRBASHOB TYHCTI.

— CHRGTBI RGTZKY

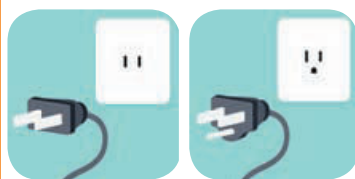
Cryptoquote: YOU'VE GOT TO JUMP OFF CLIFFS ALL THE TIME AND BUILD YOUR WINGS ON THE WAY DOWN. — RAY BRADBURY

Cruise ship Schedule: Feb. 17 - 24 2026

			ARR	DEPT	BERTH	
TUE	17	CARNIVAL HORIZON	08.00	22.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	13.30	22.30	C	1
WED	18	SERENADE OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	C	1
		FREEWINDS	06.00	****	E	1
THU	19	AIDABLU	08.00	18.00	B	1
		MSC DIVINA	08.00	18.00	C	1
FRI	20	NORWEGIAN STAR	11.00	20.00	C	1
SUN	22	ISLAND PRINCESS	08.00	17.00	B	1
		EXPLORA I	08.00	18.00	C	1
MON	23	MARELLA DISCOVERY 2	08.00	20.00	C	1
		FREEWINDS - Dept.	****	22.30	E	-
TUE	24	OCEANIA INSIGNIA	08.00	17.00	B	1
		NORWEGIAN SKY	13.30	22.30	C	1
		OASIS OF THE SEAS	08.00	23.00	I	1

Helpful tips for your stay on Aruba

(Oranjestad)—When traveling to another country, especially for the first time, it is always better to be over-prepared than under-prepared. That is why we have a list of basic but important information that we think may come in handy to Aruba's visitors.



Electrical power

Aruba generally operates on 110V to 127V supply voltage and 60Hz. There are also three types of outlets used on the island: type A with two flat prongs; type B with two flat and one grounding prong, and on occasion, type F with two round prong and two earth clips on the side. However, Type A is most commonly found in homes and establishments.



Drinking water

The water that flows through the sinks of every house, hotels and other establishments is distilled and perfectly safe to drink. Aruba's drinking water exceeds WHO's international standards for water quality, so there is no need to buy bottled water from the store.



Safety

Since February 2024, Aruba has been categorized as the safest country in the Caribbean by The Telegraph, and many tourists that visit have often told us how they feel safe to explore the island or walk around at night. However, rare incidents do occur, so keep yourself and your belongings safe.

SUDOKU

To play sudoku, use logic to fill the empty squares so that each row, each column and each 3x3 box contains the numbers 1-9 only once. Puzzle difficulty increases from Monday to Sunday.

King Classic Sudoku



Difficulty: ★★★★★

2/27

Answer to previous puzzle

6	1	2	7	9	4	3	5	8
5	4	9	1	3	8	6	2	7
7	3	8	6	2	5	9	4	1
9	2	6	5	7	3	1	8	4
8	7	4	2	1	6	5	9	3
1	5	3	4	8	9	2	7	6
2	8	7	9	6	1	4	3	5
3	6	5	8	4	2	7	1	9
4	9	1	3	5	7	8	6	2

Difficulty: ★★★

2/26

U.S. plaintiff decries harmful social media addiction

Los Angeles, United States
The plaintiff in a blockbuster social media trial in Los Angeles took the stand Thursday, telling the jury that she could not control her use of YouTube and Instagram as a child.

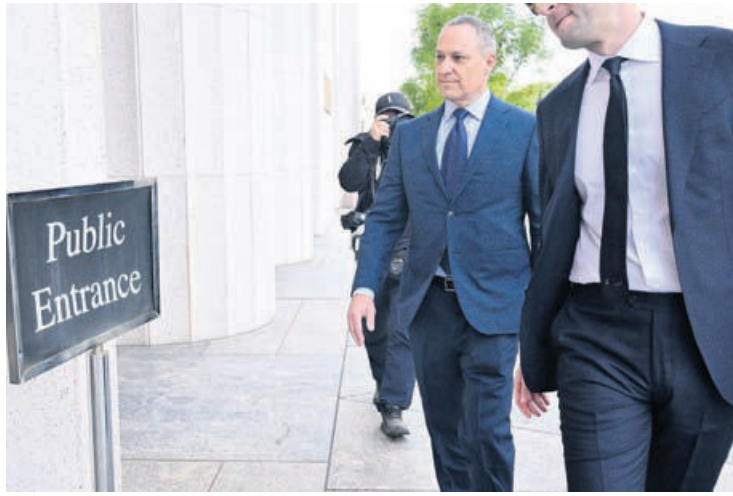
Kaley G.M., a 20-year-old California resident, painted a dire picture of a social media addiction that began when she was six years old and that she says exacerbated her mental health issues, including depression, body image problems and acts of self-harm.

"I was at a young age and I would spend all my time on it," Kaley testified when asked to explain why she thought she was addicted to YouTube. "Anytime I tried to separate myself from it, it just didn't work." Even when she was bullied on Instagram, she still stayed on the app. "If I was off, I would just feel like I was missing out."

The landmark trial is expected to last until late March, when the jury will decide whether Meta, which owns Instagram, and Google-owned YouTube knowingly designed addictive apps that harmed her mental health.

Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg took the stand last week and pushed back against accusations that his social media company had done too little to keep underage users off his platform and had profited from their presence.

In the highly anticipated testimony, Kaley took questions from her lawyer, who sought to portray her



YouTube vice president of Engineering Cristos Goodrow (D) arrives to Los Angeles Superior Court for the social media trial tasked to determine whether social media giants deliberately designed their platforms to be addictive to children, in Los Angeles, on February 23, 2026.

as an emotionally fragile user who was ensnared as a child by YouTube and Instagram and whose use of those apps caused her lasting harm.

"I'm very nervous," Kaley, wearing a pale pink cardigan, said as she began her testimony, which will include cross-examination by lawyers from Meta and Google.

Kaley described scenes from her childhood in which her mother would have her leave her phone in the living room at night, only for her to retrieve it once her mom went to bed and return it before morning.

"I would be really upset," she said, when denied access to the apps.

Her lawyer Mark Lanier said court records indicate that on one day she was on Instagram for 16 hours.

She said her mother pushed her into therapy at around

age 12, and that during the first session she said she could not engage with her family at home because of "excessive worrying because of social media."

"I stopped engaging with them as much because I was spending all my time on social media," she recalled.

She also described her heavy use of filters on Instagram from a young age to make her eyes bigger and her ears smaller. The jury was shown a video in which she complained about being fat.

Shown a banner featuring dozens of her Instagram pictures, Kaley said "almost all of them have a filter on." When asked if her life, health, sleep and grades would have been better without social media, Kaley answered: "Yes."

- Seeking job in social me-

dia -

In a surprising twist, Kaley said she would like to become a social media manager and capitalize on the skills she has built since a young age.

Kaley G.M.'s case is the first of three trials expected in the same court that will help determine whether Google and Meta deliberately designed their platforms to encourage compulsive use among young people, damaging their mental health in the process.

The outcome of the Los Angeles trials is expected to establish a standard for resolving thousands of lawsuits that blame social media for fueling an epidemic of depression, anxiety, eating disorders and suicide among young people. Similar lawsuits, including some brought by school districts, are making their way through federal court in Northern California and state courts across the country. □



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Tel. 736 2952
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Relacional Tel. 583 5400
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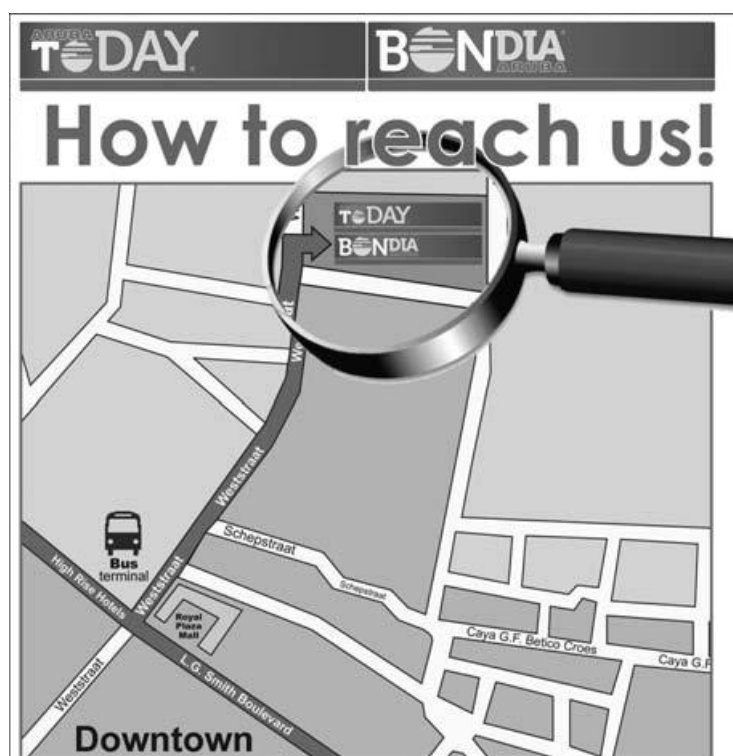
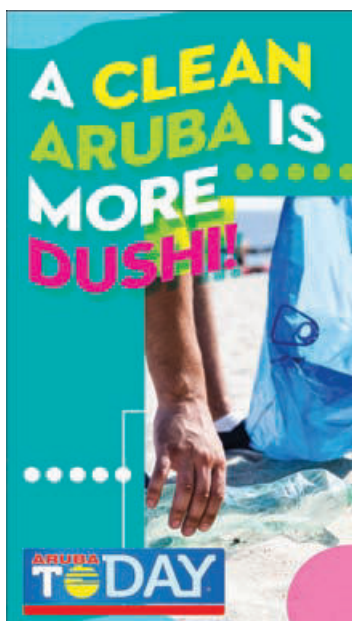
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ARUBA TODAY NEWS



Where AI lives: Southeast Asia's data centre boom

Karawang, Indonesia

Nonstop buzzing fills a windowless Microsoft data centre near Jakarta, part of a tech construction boom sweeping Southeast Asia that promises economic opportunities but is also hungry for resources. As demand for artificial intelligence heats up, technology giants are racing to invest billions of dollars in the region, attracted by a growing plugged-in user base.

New data centres warehouse-like facilities that store online files and power AI tools from chatbots to image generators are mushrooming worldwide, and the sector is growing particularly fast in Asia. AFP was recently granted rare access to a Microsoft data centre in Indonesia that is part of the new boom.

No company logo was visible on the vast boxy exterior of the centre, and visitors were only admitted after careful security checks. Keeping the systems whirling is a constant operation, with technicians on site even during religious holidays. Data centre capacity in Southeast Asia is projected to triple from 2025 levels by 2030, driven by a tenfold surge in AI use, according to a KPMG report. "We expect every app, every workload, every user to



In this photo taken on February 4, 2026, racks of GPUs (graphics processing units) with a closed-loop liquid cooling system are seen inside an operational Microsoft data centre in Karawang, West Java.

be using AI in some part of their workflow" in just a few years, Alistair Speirs, a manager for infrastructure at Microsoft, told AFP.

But many of Asia's data centres will add demand to grids still heavily reliant on planet-warming fossil fuels. And to keep servers from overheating, they will place new pressure on often-stretched local water supplies.

- AI at work -

At the Indonesian data centre, racks of metal-cased servers in tall white cabinets were busy an-

swering AI queries for local users in an intensive, heat-generating process. A "closed-loop" water cooling system, which works a bit like a car radiator and does not require regular refills, prevents them from malfunctioning.

Higher performance chips "require a lot more intensity", Noelle Walsh, head of the company's cloud operations, told AFP. "We've had to adapt our data centres' designs to accommodate different power structures and different cooling mechanisms." Super-connected Singapore was long Southeast

Asia's data centre hotspot, but the city state halted developments between 2019 and 2022 over energy, water and land use worries. That, along with an explosion of AI interest after ChatGPT's debut, brought a surge of data centres to neighbouring Malaysia, and increasingly Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam. "The boom is there," with companies racing for "first-player advantage", said Tung Ghi of the consulting firm Arthur D. Little. Hosting data centres is a "win-win situation" for governments, he said, noting it boosts business efficiency

with faster online tools and grows local economies as people come to work at new tech parks.

- Hyperscale -

The data centre expansion will increase demand on power grids that are still heavily coal dependent. Power consumption by data centres in Indonesia where coal generates nearly 70 percent of electricity will likely quadruple by 2030, according to energy think tank Ember. Microsoft's Jakarta facilities, spread out to mitigate risks from earthquakes and floods, are part of a \$1.7 billion investment with a potential "hyperscale" capacity that would need hundreds of megawatts of electricity.

The company says it works to "green" local grids by incentivising energy transition plans. "We don't build power plants, but we work with utility providers," Microsoft's Walsh said. "In some parts of the world it is wind power, in other parts of the world it is solar, we also use hydropower, and in some countries it's nuclear. So we support all of those." Microsoft recently signed a deal with Indonesia's state-owned electricity provider to raise the nation's renewable energy capacity by around 200 megawatts over a decade. □

Snake-like robot unveiled for Fukushima debris removal



A robotic arm demonstrates the removal of melted nuclear fuel debris during a simulation at the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant, operated by Tokyo Electric Power Company, in Naraha Town, Fukushima Prefecture on February 25, 2026.

Tokyo, Japan

A 22-metre robot arm will help remove a third sample of radioactive debris from inside Japan's stricken Fukushima nuclear plant, its operators said Thursday, as it unveiled the snake-like device. Dangerously high radiation levels make removing melted fuel and other debris from the plant hit by a huge tsunami in 2011 the most daunting challenge in the decades-long decommissioning project. Around 880 tonnes of hazardous material remain inside the power station, the site of one of the world's worst nuclear accidents after a tsunami was triggered by a 9.0-magnitude earthquake.

A four-minute video released on Wednesday by plant operator TEPCO showed a snake-like robot arm -- measuring 22 me-

tres and weighing about 4.6 tonnes moving through small tunnel-like passages and inspecting complex structures within a confined space.

The robot is equipped with a camera and "is better at retrieving information" than previous devices used, company spokesman Kyo Ito told AFP.

TEPCO plans to use the robot later this year to conduct its third trial debris removal operation at one of the melted reactors in the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, he said.

Tiny samples of radioactive material have twice been collected under a trial project using special tools, but full-fledged extractions are yet to take place.

TEPCO announced in July that the massive operation to remove debris had been delayed until at least 2037. □

Spurs win 10th straight, Pistons silence Thunder in battle of NBA's best

Los Angeles, United States

The San Antonio Spurs edged the Toronto Raptors 110-107 on Wednesday, pushing their NBA winning streak to 10 games and closing in on Western Conference leaders Oklahoma City Thunder, who fell to the Detroit Pistons.

Devin Vassell scored 21 points and De'Aaron Fox added 20 for the Spurs, who overcame a lackluster offensive night from superstar Victor Wembanyama to push their win streak to double digits for the first time since the 2015-16 season.

The French big man connected on just three of 12 shots on the way to 12 points in the face of a determined Raptors defense. But Wembanyama was five-for-six from the free-throw line, and his five blocks included a crucial denial of Jakob Poeltl with 44 seconds remaining. The Spurs improved to 42-16, just two games behind Oklahoma City, who fell to 45-15 after their 124-116 loss to the Pistons in Detroit.

Cade Cunningham and Jalen Duren scored 29 points apiece to lead the Pistons in a battle of con-



Jaylin Williams #6 of the Oklahoma City Thunder holds onto the ball against Cade Cunningham #2 and Jalen Duren #0 of the Detroit Pistons during the third quarter at Little Caesars Arena on February 25, 2026 in Detroit, Michigan.

ference leaders touted as a possible NBA Finals preview.

The clash lost some luster with Oklahoma City's reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Shai Gilgeous-Alexander headlining a raft of Thunder absentees as he missed a ninth straight game with an abdominal strain.

Isaiah Hartenstein, Chet Holmgren, Ajay Mitchell

and Jalen Williams were also sidelined, and Isaiah Joe departed at halftime with a bruised hip.

The depleted Thunder led 34-22 after a tight first quarter, but the Pistons out-scored them 36-18 in the second period to seize control and never trailed in the second half.

Duren added 15 rebounds for his 27th double-double of the season. Cunning-

ham handed out 13 assists for Eastern Conference leaders Detroit, who saw a 17-point lead whittled to four with 39.2 seconds left. Cunningham found Duren for a dunk and then drained a pair of free throws as the Pistons held on and at 43-44 slipped ahead of Oklahoma City for best record in the league.

- Nuggets down Celtics -

They strengthened their grip on first place in the East over the Boston Celtics, who fell 103-84 to the Nuggets in Denver.

Nikola Jokic scored 30 points and grabbed 12 rebounds for the Nuggets, who prevailed despite the early exit of ailing Jamal Murray.

Jaylen Brown returned from a one-game injury absence to score 23 points for Boston.

In Milwaukee, the Bucks shook off the continued absence of superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo to beat the Cleveland Cavaliers 118-116.

Jarrett Allen scored 27 points and pulled down 11 rebounds for Cleveland, but his last-gasp effort that would have forced overtime was ruled to have left his hand after the buzzer.

The Cavs were without star guard James Harden, who suffered a broken thumb in a win over the New York Knicks on Tuesday.

Harden, who arrived in a trade from the LA Clippers this month, was listed as "questionable" up until game time but joined Donovan Mitchell and Evan Mobley on the sidelines. □

Mbappe season on ice ahead of silverware sprint, World Cup

Madrid, Spain

French superstar Kylian Mbappe may have to put his season on hold because of a knee problem, with his main goals fast coming into view -- a first major trophy with Real Madrid, and a second World Cup triumph. Little more than 100 days from the start of the 2026 World Cup, the France captain seems to be paying the price for efforts he has made to carry his team this season.

According to several sources contacted by AFP, Mbappe, hampered by damage to the outer ligament of his left knee since late 2025, had to withdraw from Madrid's squad to face Benfica in the Champions League

play-off round on Wednesday because he felt "pain that was too persistent" in training.

Mbappe is expected to rest for at least 10 days so he can recover from the issue which has troubled him over the past couple of months.

His absence for one of the most important matches of the season, confirmed by Madrid on Wednesday, is a concern for Los Blancos, who lost at Osasuna in La Liga on Saturday to allow Barcelona back in front in the title race.

Beyond a personal quest for glory, having finished his first season at Madrid without a major trophy, the intense pressure and demand for results at the

Santiago Bernabeu have contributed to Mbappe playing through the pain in recent weeks.

"It's important to highlight the immense effort Kylian is making and the fact that he's trying to help us out on the patch," said Madrid coach Alvaro Arbeloa on Tuesday. Mbappe flew to Saudi Arabia in January to appear in the Spanish Super Cup final against Barcelona as a substitute, having missed the semi-final because of knee pain, but his team fell to defeat.

- Key figure -

It is hard to imagine where the Spanish giants would be without their No 10's supreme finishing ability, as Mbappe has netted 38 goals in 33 matches this

season across all competitions. At least winger Vinicius Junior has finally hit top form after a slow start to the season and could pick up some of the slack, along with promising young striker Gonzalo Gar-

cia, who Madrid fans are keen to see more of.

Mbappe is top scorer in both La Liga and the Champions League, even in a dysfunctional Madrid side that sacked coach Xabi Alonso in January. □



Real Madrid's French forward #10 Kylian Mbappe and Osasuna's Spanish forward #14 Ruben Garcia Santos (R) fight for the ball during the Spanish league football match between CA Osasuna and Real Madrid CF at El Sadar Stadium in Pamplona on February 21, 2026.

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Medvedev sets up Dubai semi clash with Auger-Aliassime

Dubai, United Arab Emirates

Daniil Medvedev produced a clinical 6-2, 6-1 performance against Jensen Brooksby on Thursday to advance to his third Dubai semi-final and book a showdown with Felix Auger-Aliassime.

The former world number one boasts 22 career titles but has never won the same tournament twice. He is trying to change that this week in Dubai, where he lifted the trophy in 2023. "I felt great. I know that maybe he had some issues, shoulder or elbow, I'm not sure, but his first serve was not going as probably he can usually do," said Medvedev, who is seeking a second title of the season to go with the one he won in Brisbane.

"But you still need to play, you still need to put the returns in. He's a big fighter... I'm happy with the way I'm



Canada's Felix Auger-Aliassime returns the ball to France's Adrian Mannarino during their ATP World Tour Open Occitanie Men's final tennis match in Montpellier, southern France on February 8, 2026.

playing here and I'm looking forward to the semis."

In what was his second ca-

reer meeting with Brooksby, two breaks of serve helped Medvedev scoop the opening set in just 28

minutes.

The third-seeded Russian kept up his momentum in the second, breaking early

and cruising towards victory in just 57 minutes.

Medvedev advanced to the 53rd hard-court semi-final of his career, trailing just Novak Djokovic among active players.

He said ahead of the tournament he is searching for consistency, something that came to him easier when he was younger, playing care-free tennis without much overthinking.

"I think there were moments in my career where I was better prepared. Funny enough, less with experience... You know how they say, rookies get lucky," added Medvedev on Thursday.

"Everything was new. I just didn't care, I was just playing the way I felt it. Now I have a lot of thoughts in my head, which can help me sometimes, but sometimes I need to get rid of them to play better." □